

Hello, Chair Partridge. Keith and I listened to your committee discussion of H.697 last week with Rep. Bongartz and we heard several important questions from committee members. While we don't mean to question or quarrel with Rep. Bongartz' responses, we thought it might be helpful to share some further thoughts in response to the questions from our vantage point and have outlined them below. We hope you'll share and that this information is indeed helpful to you all. Please do let me know if you have any questions or need any follow up. Thanks. m

Rep. O'Brien - Can invasive plants prevent a forest from achieving old forest functions? *Yes, very much so, and that is why restoration is required. See page 20 of our [report](#) to House Natural Resources, Fish & Wildlife.*

Rep. Pearl - Why can't the ESTAs be expanded to meet this goal? *ESTAs can't be expanded because ESTAs are limited to a portion of a parcel and current rules require that at least a portion of the parcel be managed for sawtimber. Furthermore, a very small portion of the landscape is comprised by ESTAs and they are scattered. Many of the values of old forest accrue when it occurs in big blocks. Expansion of the ESTA category across a property would conflict with rules and would not advance the old forest targets at the parcel level in ways that would meet the current goals of H. 697.*

Rep. Norris – Does land enrolled in Reserve Forestland need a management plan even if it isn't being managed for sawtimber? *The requirement for management plans is to ensure program integrity (confirm eligibility of the land and to ensure purposes of the enrollment category are being realized). Secondly, the requirement for a plan supports co-benefits of the program – landowner education, working relationships among landowners and forestry professionals, and jobs.*

Rep. Bock - Is the Hold Harmless payment to towns (reimbursement) paid from the Ed fund? *The reimbursement to towns is not from the Ed fund. It is from the General Fund. The Ed fund only experience foregone revenue, not expenditures. See page 11.*  
<https://tax.vermont.gov/sites/tax/files/documents/RP-1295-2021.pdf>

Rep. Bock – Are these parcels not going to be harvested anyway if it is all ESTA land? *It is likely that some significant portions of the Reserve Forestland parcels would never be harvested because of barriers to harvesting. However, currently, to be eligible all forestland parcels require harvesting unless specific acres are exempted based on ESTA conditions. All of the parcels that would be eligible for Reserve Forestland need to be harvested at some point under current requirements, and no parcel is eligible unless they have at least 20 acres that can be managed for forest products. See page 7 of our [report](#).*

Rep. O'Brien – If you move away from timber harvests towards biodiversity, is there a financial cost to the state or reduction of financial benefits? *There will be costs and benefits. We believe the approach could add some new ecological benefits to the program not previously possible, while maintaining most ecological and financial benefits and limiting the costs. However, there will be costs. These potential costs were discussed on page 27 of FPR's [report](#) to House Natural Resources Fish & Wildlife.*

Rep. O'Brien – Could the parcels eligible for Reserve Forest be mapped? How many parcel owners would know if this new category is a possibility? *The parcels have been modeled and mapped and this formed the basis for our eligibility estimates. It is a good question as to whether the map would or should be made available to landowners or consulting foresters to help with evaluation of eligibility. It is important to stress that while mapping is good and we believe that our statewide modeling is accurate at the statewide level, there will be parcels where mapping is imperfect and will not accurately reflect the eligibility potential of a parcel.*